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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004103

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SUBJECT: IRAQI CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVIST DISCUSSES SOURCES OF
VIOLENCE

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for reasons 1.4 (B)
and (D).

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[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: In a recent meeting, ex-Transitional National
Assembly (TNA) member and civil society activist Dr. Amal
Kashif Al-Ghita expressed concern that neither GOI nor USG
policy is truly addressing what she see as the sources of the
violence in Iraq. She lamented that the tolerance her
grandfather, Ayatollah Sheikh Mohammad Hussein Kashif
Al-Ghita, the senior cleric (marja) in Najaf in the 1930s,
had been destroyed by "dirty sectarian politics." She
recently toured Iraq and came away convinced that
unemployment, poor housing and poor education are
exacerbating terrorism. END SUMMARY.

&Educational Poverty8

[12](#). (C) Al-Ghita said that she had seen widespread educational
poverty, even in areas where people were not suffering from
financial poverty. She said at the Iraq-Iran border, some
children must walk up to five kilometers each way to attend
school. Many families in this area are financially well-off,
she claimed, largely owing to smuggling activities across the
border. However, with poor access to education, children
were growing up with few alternatives and little exposure to
anything but criminal activities. Their activities were
providing weapons to terrorists and introducing uneducated
and inexperienced young adults to dangerous people and
ideologies.

[13](#). (C) Al-Ghita said that she had addressed her concerns to
Minister of Education Khudair Al-Khuzai upon her return to
Baghdad. Al-Khuzai told her that there was no money in the
budget to build and operate more schools (NOTE: IRMO
estimates that up to 93% of the MOE,s budget is consumed by
salaries. END NOTE). Al-Ghita suggested using local
construction methods, specifically constructing the buildings
from locally available reedy plants. Al-Khuzai refused to
consider the idea, telling Al-Ghita he preferred instead to
focus on building fewer but more modern institutions.

Housing and Violence

[14](#). (C) During her tour, Al-Ghita also spent time in Sadr
City, where she noted that a significant housing problem that
she believes contributes to increased violence. Although she
admitted that the problem had been exacerbated by internal
displacement caused by this year,s increase in sectarian
violence, she noted that it had begun long ago during the
economic sanctions following the first Gulf War. As families
have grown and extended relatives are unable to afford

alternative housing, households have steadily expanded. Al-Ghita said that she had personally seen households containing as many as 25 people living in 1-2 room accommodations. Such close quarters had raised a generation full of anger and frustration, and "no one should be surprised that 15 and 16 year olds are now planting IEDs," she said.

15. (C) Al-Ghita called for more low-income housing units to be built, preferably further from urban centers. She predicted that reducing the population density in cities would have an overall positive impact on both health and quality of life, and would help to spread wealth and economic development to more Iraqis. She claimed that existing government housing programs are corrupt, and that housing was only allocated for friends and relatives of officials, or those with connections. (NOTE: Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih and the Minister of Housing and Construction Bayan Dizayee are leading a project to provide \$500 million in FY07 funding for low cost housing throughout the country. In theory, participant selection for the project will be based on a point system. END NOTE). She noted that Baghdad University had done studies on cost-effective building strategies for low-income housing, and offered to obtain copies of their report.

Unemployment

16. (C) Al-Ghita lamented that unemployment is crippling the economy, contributing to a sharp increase in domestic violence, and forcing men to turn to militias and other criminal gangs for "employment and salary." Creation of "satellite cities" would help to provide jobs, jump-start

BAGHDAD 00004103 002 OF 002

development efforts and decrease the "level of tension that had developed between the Iraqi people," she claimed.

16. (C) In addition to officials previously noted, Al-Ghita discussed her findings with DPM Barham Salih upon her return. He suggested that she organize a conference on violence in Iraq for political leaders and subject matter experts. Al-Ghita said that she supported the idea of bringing these groups together, noting that solutions to such basic problems were not logistically difficult, but rather a matter of political will. However she reportedly told DPM Salih that she would not participate in such a conference unless he could guarantee that the resulting recommendations would be implemented.

Bio Notes

17. (C) Al-Ghita comes from a prominent and well respected Shia family. She claims that her family has been in Iraq for more than 1400 years, and that with six marja including her grandfather who was the Grand Ayatollah in the family, they have contributed more to the clerical establishment in Iraq than any other family. She was a member of the Transitional National Assembly (TNA) as a Shia Independent on the Etilaf list. She ran for a seat in the Council of Representatives as a member of Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress party, but was unsuccessful. She still supports Chalabi, but is unsure whether or not she will run in provincial elections.

KHALILZAD